

Protecting Lab land and the creatures that inhabit it

April 1, 2013



Protecting our sensitive habitat

The Laboratory must protect areas where threatened and endangered species nest each spring. As a result, fire mitigation work (see related story below) with heavy equipment stopped on March 1, and the ban may not be lifted until May 15. If wildlife surveys indicate sensitive species in canyons and adjacent areas, restrictions could remain in effect through August 31. While Lab property is home to the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, of more concern is the Mexican Spotted Owl, which is more likely to nest in canyons where Lab activity potentially takes place.

The work restrictions comply with the Lab's Habitat Management Plan written in conjunction with the National Nuclear Security Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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With moisture levels down, risk for a severe fire season is up, but the Lab is working diligently to mitigate possible danger.

“We anticipate an extreme and early fire season this spring and have a very aggressive schedule in place to reduce hazards prior to its peak, which usually arrives in May,” said Manny L’Esperance, fire management officer with the Emergency Management group.

Measures taken to prepare for the 2013 fire season:

- Cutting trees and other potential fire fuels equal to 100 tons of biomass, and chipping that debris to make it available for landscaping and compost through the Los Alamos County landfill;
- Grading roads to create fire breaks and improve access to back-county areas of Laboratory property in the event of fire;
- Developing pre-fire suppression plans for potential ignition points to expedite initial attack efforts; and
- Conducting tabletop exercises for emergency responders to prepare for wildfire.

Another way the Lab is preparing is by strengthening its collaboration with the Interagency Wildfire Management Team that currently meets on a bi-weekly basis. In addition to the Laboratory, the team includes Los Alamos County, Santa Fe County, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Valles Caldera National Preserve, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and New Mexico State Forestry Division. The meetings are open to the public.

For more information, go to <http://www.lanl.gov/resources/emergency/index.php>.

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